

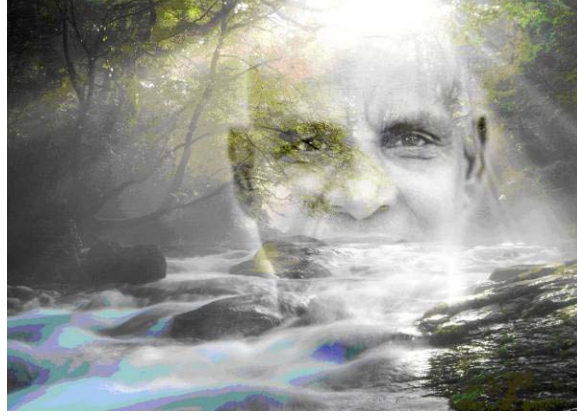
# THE VAIRĀGYA-ŚATAKAM OF BHARTRHARI (c.450—510 CE)

---

*The Hundred Verses on Renunciation*



*Set into Poem-form*



*Om Namah Sivanandaya*

### **Preface**

Startling it is somehow to grasp how the life struggles of ancient times as portrayed in the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, in all of the scriptures, and in the writings of the sage Bharatrihari, pertain – in precise detail – to this very moment of our struggles and concerns.

In the hundred poems of Bharatrihari, paying homage to Shiva, the Light of Knowledge, at the very outset, are reiterated the maze of entrapments of earthly life and their consequences – all the while he beckons us towards discrimination, meditation, and ultimately transcendence – that we may take up the glorious way of the wise, like the sage who knows the ‘bliss of self-possession’ and ultimately merges in the Supreme Brahman.

‘Take that path of highest good which  
Is capable of bringing about, in a moment,  
The destruction of endless troubles!’

Swami Sivananda reveals to us, in glorious word and song, the great and comforting promise amidst every teaching imparted: that the Self may be realised by one who lives here in the world!... that the Self may be realised in this very life!

May the benign grace and ananya blessings of Sri Gurudev be upon all.

Jai Sri Gurudev!

JGS

The subjects of the untitled, numbered poems  
of Bharatrihari will be found in the Index on page 38.



## BHARTRIHARI'S CAVE

*Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, India*





O Revered Bhartrihari of ancient times!  
To thee our homage!  
You who wrote by streams of light  
In caves of Ujjain, Bharata Varsh,  
Having soared above passion's inestimable surges,  
To the ends of the earth did you stretch yourself—  
In the name of 'Desire, thou of insatiable yearning'!—  
To realize the insubstantial nature of all things!  
We hear so joyfully thy poems  
Of Shiva's awakening!  
Like the song-verses of the Upanishads,  
Here in depths of heart,  
Centuries hence!  
That beckon: 'Dissolve all structures built!  
That house the unchallenged beliefs you so fiercely defend,  
In countless lifetimes of mindless preoccupations  
Nowhere close to Him,  
Of postponement of Self-realisation.'  
Arising! Awakening!  
'Blissful in the Self alone'!  
Through Lord's Grace  
May we attain to that Ecstasy itself.



# The Vairāgya-Śatakam

1

All glory to Shiva<sup>1</sup>, the Light of Knowledge,  
Residing in the temple of the Yogis' heart,  
Who smites away like the rising sun  
The massive front of the endless night  
Of ignorance overcasting human minds!—  
In whose wake follow all auspiciousness and prosperity,  
Who burnt up gay Lust as a moth, as if in sport,  
And who appears beaming with the lambent rays  
Of the crescent adorning his forehead:  
Rays that look pleasing like soft half-blooming buds.

2

Many are the inaccessible and perilous places  
I have travelled and yet obtained no riches;  
Sacrificing proper dignity of birth and social position,  
In vain have I served the rich;  
Like the crows have I fed myself, devoid of self-respect,  
At the house of others in the expectation of gain;  
And yet, O Desire! thou prompter of evil deeds,  
Thou art waxing lustier and art not still satisfied.

3

The earth have I dug into  
In quest of precious minerals,  
And metals from rocks have I smelted;  
The oceans have I crossed,  
And the favour of kings have I diligently sought;  
Nights have I spent on burning grounds  
With my mind occupied with *mantras* and worship<sup>2</sup>;  
And not even a broken cowrie<sup>3</sup> have I obtained;

---

<sup>1</sup> As is customary with Sanskrit poets, this opening verse is dedicatory, (to Siva in this instance), as forming an auspicious introduction.

<sup>2</sup> This forms a part of the mysterious rites to be gone through by those who invoke supernatural agencies for obtaining riches.

<sup>3</sup> seashell

Be satisfied, therefore, O Desire!

4

In our servile attendance on the wicked wealthy  
Their shabby manners and talk  
We have somehow put up with;  
Suppressing tears that welled up from our hearts,  
We have smiled out of vacant minds;  
Obeisance we have made to dullards  
Stultified by too much wealth;  
In what more fooleries would you have me dance,  
O Desire, thou of insatiable yearning!

5

What have we not endeavoured to do,  
With our depraved conscience,  
For the sake of our *pranas*,  
The five vital forces which are unreliable  
And compared to water on the leaves of lotus,  
Since in the presence of the rich,  
With their minds stupefied by the pride of wealth,  
We have shamelessly committed the sin  
Of recounting our own merits!

6

We have forgiven, but not out of forgiveness  
But out of our incapacity to right our wrongs;  
We have renounced the comforts of home life,  
But not out of contentment after satisfaction  
But as an exile from home in quest of riches;  
Though we have suffered inclemencies of weather:  
Cold and heat so difficult to bear,  
Still it is not religious austerities that we have undergone;  
With subdued vital forces,  
Night and day have we brooded on money  
And not on the feet of Shiva;  
Thus we have performed those very acts

Which the Munis<sup>+</sup> perform  
But of their good effect we have deprived ourselves.

7

The worldly pleasures have not been enjoyed by us,  
But we ourselves have been devoured;  
No religious austerities have been gone through,  
But we ourselves have become scorched  
By the austerities of grief or anxiety;  
Time is not gone, being ever-present and infinite,  
But it is we who are gone because of approaching death.  
Desire is not reduced in force,  
Though we ourselves are reduced to senility.

8

The face has been attacked with wrinkles,  
The head has been painted white with grey hair,  
The limbs are all enfeebled;  
But desire alone is rejuvenating.

9

Though my compeers, dear to me as life,  
Have all taken such a speedy flight to heaven  
Before being overtaken by old age;  
Though the impulse for enjoyment is wearied out  
And the respect commanded from all persons lost;  
Though my sight is obstructed by cataract  
And the body can raise itself but slowly on the staff,  
Still, alas, for its stillness, this body startles  
At the thought of dissolution by death!

---

<sup>+</sup> Munis: saintly recluses



10

Hope is like a flowing river of which  
 The ceaseless desires constitute the waters;  
 It rages with the waves of keen longings,  
 And the attachments for various objects  
 Are its animals of prey;  
 Scheming thoughts of greed  
 Are the aquatic birds that abound on it,  
 And it destroys in its course  
 The big trees of patience and fortitude;  
 It is rendered impassable  
 By the whirlpools of ignorance,  
 And as profound in depth of bed as it is,  
 Its banks of anxious deliberation  
 Are precipitous indeed.  
 Upon such a river  
 The great Yogis of pure mind pass across—  
 To enjoy supreme felicity.

11

I do not find the virtuous distinction produced by  
 Ceremonial observances through life after life  
 To be conducive to well-being;  
 For the sum of such virtuous merits  
 When weighed in mind inspires fear in me.  
 Enjoyments earned by great accession of merit  
 Multiply so greatly in the case of people attached to them,  
 Only to bring them misery and peril!

12

The objects of enjoyment,  
 Even after staying with us for a long time,  
 Are sure to leave us sometime;  
 Then what difference their privation  
 In this way makes to men,  
 That they do not of their own accord discard them?  
 If the enjoyments leave us on their own initiative,

That is to say, if they tear themselves from us,  
They produce great affliction of the mind;  
But if men voluntarily renounce them,  
They conduce to the eternal bliss of self-possession!

13

Ah! It must be indeed a difficult feat to accomplish:  
For persons—their minds purified  
By the discrimination arising from  
The knowledge of Brahman: freed from desire,  
To wholly discard that wealth  
Which has brought them enjoyment;  
Whereas we fail to renounce enjoyments  
Which are reaped by us as mere longings  
And which we never did realize in the past,  
Nor do we realize now—  
Nor can we count upon  
As lasting when obtained in future.

14

Blessed are those who live in mountain caves  
Meditating on Brahman, the Supreme Light,  
While birds devoid of fear perch on their laps  
And drink the tear-drops of bliss  
That they shed in meditation,  
While our life is fast ebbing away  
In the excitement of revelry in palatial mansions  
Or on the banks of refreshing pools or in pleasure-gardens:  
All created and brooded over merely by imagination!

15

For food, I have what begging brings  
And that, too, tasteless and once a day;  
For bed, the earth,  
And for attendant, the body itself;  
For dress, I have a worn-out blanket  
Made up of a hundred patches!

And still, alas! the desires do not leave me!

16

Lumps of flesh, voluptuous forms—  
The golden vessels of poesy  
Compared to the moon!  
Just what is the body?  
A vat of secretions—  
Saliva and phlegm,  
Deserving of constant contempt.

17

Among sensual persons, Shiva is unique  
Sharing half His body with His beloved;  
And again, among the dispassionate,  
There is none superior to Him,  
Unattached to the company of women;  
While the rest of mankind  
Smitten and stupefied by the irresistible,  
Serpent-like poisoned arrows of Cupid,  
And brought under the infatuation of Love,  
Can neither enjoy their desires  
Nor renounce them at will.



On one side grows the hair in long and black curls,  
And on the other, corded like rope;  
One side is white with ashes, like the snow-mountains,  
The other golden as the light of the dawn.  
For He, the Lord, took a form,  
And that was a divided form—  
Half-woman and half-man.



Ordinary persons, when they  
Give themselves up to enjoyments,  
Lose all control and become their slaves;

So even when satiety comes,  
They cannot detach themselves from them,  
As the force of blind attachment has enslaved them.  
But Shiva, who has subdued His mind,  
Is unaffected by them,  
As in His State of mental poise of Yoga,  
Pleasure and pain are the same to him.

18

Without knowing its burning power  
The insect jumps into the glowing fire;  
The fish through ignorance  
Eats the bait attached to the hook;  
Whereas we, having full discernment,  
Do not renounce the sensual desires,  
Complicated as they are with manifold dangers;  
Alas! how inscrutable is the power of delusion!

19

When the mouth is parched with thirst,  
Man takes some cold refreshing or sweetened drink;  
When suffering from hunger  
He swallows boiled rice made delicious with meat and the like;  
When set on fire by lust,  
He fast embraces his wife;  
So 'happiness' is but the remedying  
Of these diseases—hunger, thirst and lust;  
And behold how man's sense is upset in its quest!

20

Possessed of tall mansions,  
Of sons esteemed by the learned,  
Of untold wealth,  
Of a beloved wife full of beneficence,  
And of youthful age,  
And thinking this world to be permanent,  
Men deluded by ignorance

Run into this prison-house of worldliness;  
Whereas blessed indeed is he  
Who considering the impermanence of the same world,  
Renounces it.

21

If one had occasion to see  
One's wife suffering without food  
And sore aggrieved at the constant sight  
Of hungry crying children with piteous looks  
Pulling at her worn-out clothes,  
What self-respecting man would  
For the mere sake of his own petty stomach  
Utter 'give me': become a suppliant for favour,  
In a voice faltering and sticking at the throat  
For fear of his prayer being refused?

22

The pit of our stomach so hard to fill  
Is the root indeed of no small undoing:  
It is ingenious in severing the vital knots, as it were,  
Of our fond self-respect;  
It is like the bright moonlight shining on the lotus  
(That species which blooms only in the sun)  
Of highly estimable virtues,  
It is the hatchet that hews down  
The luxuriant creepers of our great modesty.

23

For the sake of filling the empty stomach when hungry  
A man of self-respect would wander from door to door  
With a begging bowl in hand  
Having its edge covered with white cloth,  
Away in extensive woodlands or holy places,  
Of which the approaches are grey all over  
With the smoke of sacrificial fires  
Tended by Brahmanas versed in ritualistic niceties,

And thus preserve the *pranas*—  
Rather than live like a beggar from day to day  
Among those who are socially one's equals.

24

Ah! is it that those Himalayan solitudes  
Cooled by liquid sprays of Ganges' waves  
And abounding in beautiful rocky flats—  
Such as are the haunts of the Vidyadharas,  
Are all engulfed in destruction,  
That men in disgrace hang on others  
For their maintenance?

25

Or is it that roots and herbs  
Have all disappeared from grovy caves  
And streams have gone away from hillsides,  
Or that branches of trees bearing luscious fruits  
And yielding barks are all destroyed,  
That the faces of wretches,  
Perfectly devoid of good breeding,  
Are found to have their eyebrows dancing  
Like creepers in the wind of an arrogance  
Which their scanty earning,  
Eked out with hardship, engenders in them?

26

Therefore, now accepting roots and fruits,  
Ordained as sacred,  
For the most enjoyable means of maintenance,  
And so also the earth laid on with verdant leafy twigs for your bed,  
O, rise and repair to the forest,  
Where even the name is not constantly heard of the ignoble rich  
Whose minds are stultified by indiscretion  
And whose speech is delirious with the maladies of wealth.

27

When there is the fruit of trees  
Easily obtainable at will in every forest,  
When there is cool refreshing drink  
In holy streams from place to place  
And soft bed made of tender twigs and creepers,  
Still, alas! men aggrieved with lucre  
Undergo sorrows at the doors of the rich.

28

Reposing on the bed of stone within the mountain cave  
During intervals of meditation,  
Well may I recollect with an inward smile  
The days of those afflicted through their appeals before the rich,  
Or of those grown mean through their minds  
Being content with seeking enjoyments.

29

The felicity of those whom contentment  
Unceasingly makes happy, is not interrupted,  
While cravings of those  
Of greedy and confounded minds  
Are never quenched.  
Such being the case,  
For whom did the Creator create the Meru,  
Representing inconceivable wealth,  
But confining to itself the glorious potency of its goldenness?  
I would not covet it.

30

The great Yogis describe food which begging brings  
As follows:  
It does not humiliate<sup>5</sup>;  
It is an independent pleasure:  
Not dependent on the pleasure

---

<sup>5</sup> Vide verse 23: 'For the sake of filling the cavity of the stomach when hungry.'

Of earning money, fulfilling social duty, etc;  
It is in all respects free from any anxious fear  
About such as one's expenditure, or food-stores, etc;  
It destroys wicked pride, egotism and impatience;  
It eradicates the manifold evils of worldly existence;  
It is easily available anywhere, any day without efforts;  
It is the beloved of the holy men;  
It is a purification by itself;  
It is as the inexhaustible feeding-house of Shiva—  
Access to which none can prevent!

31

In enjoyment, there is the fear of disease;  
In social position, the fear of falling-off;  
In wealth, the fear of hostile kings;  
In honour, the fear of humiliation;  
In power, the fear of foemen;  
In beauty, the fear of old age;  
In scriptural erudition, the fear of opponents;  
In virtue, the fear of traducers<sup>6</sup>;  
In body, the fear of death.  
All the things of this world pertaining to man  
Are attended with fear;  
Renunciation alone stands for fearlessness.

32

Birth is attacked by death;  
Brilliant youth by old age;  
Contentment by greed;  
Happiness of self-control  
By the wiles of gay women;  
Virtues by the jealousy of men;  
Forest tracts by beasts of prey;  
Kings by wicked counsel;  
And powers even are vitiated  
By their evanescence;

---

<sup>6</sup> Traducers: those who speak maliciously and falsely; slander; defame: to traduce someone's character



What on earth is not seized upon  
By something else?

33

Health of men is rooted out  
By hundreds of varied ailments  
Of body and mind;  
Whereupon Lakshmi,  
The goddess of prosperity, alights:  
There perils find an open access;  
Death surely annexes to itself,  
Rendering impotent very soon,  
Whatever is born again and again.  
Then what is created as stable  
By the absolute Creator?

34

Enjoyments are unstable  
Like the breaking of high waves,  
Life is liable to speedy dissolution;  
The buoyancy of youthful happiness  
Centered in our objects of love  
Lasts for few days.  
Understanding that the whole  
World is unsubstantial,  
Ye wise teachers of men with  
Minds intent on benefitting mankind  
By living exemplary lives,  
Pour forth your energies  
For attaining the highest beatitude!

35

Enjoyments of embodied beings are fleeting  
Like the quick play of lightning within a mass of clouds;  
Life is as insecure as a drop of water attached to the edge  
Of a lotus-leaf and dispersed by the wind;  
The desires of youth are unsteady;

Realising these quickly,  
Let the wise firmly fix their minds in Yoga,  
Easily attainable by patience and equanimity.

36

Life is changing like a big wave:  
Beauty of youth abides for a few days,  
Earthly possessions are as transient as thought;  
The whole series of our enjoyments  
Are like occasional flashes of autumnal lightning.  
The embrace round the neck given by our beloveds  
Lingers only for a while.  
To cross the ocean of the fear of the world,  
Attach your mind to Brahman.

37

In the womb man lies within impure matter  
In discomfort, with limbs cramped;  
In early life enjoyment is tainted with  
The intense suffering of mental distraction  
Arising from separation from our beloved;  
Even old age is undesirable, being the object  
Of contemptible laughter from women.  
Then, O men! say if there is  
A particle of happiness in the world!

38

Old age looms ahead,  
Frightening men like a tigress;  
Different diseases afflict  
The human body like enemies;  
Life is flowing away like water  
Running out of a leaky vessel;  
Still, how wonderful that man  
Goes on doing wicked deeds.

39

Manifold and transitory in nature are the enjoyments,  
And of such is this world made up.  
So what for would you wander about here, O men?  
Cease exerting yourselves for them;  
And if you put faith in our word,  
On the Supreme Foundation of this Abode,  
Concentrate your mind purified by  
Quelling hope with its hundred meshes  
And freed from its liability to create desire.

40

There is one Enjoyment and one alone,  
Lasting, immutable and supreme,  
Of which the taste  
Renders tasteless the greatest possessions:  
Such as sovereignty of the three worlds,  
And established in which Brahma, Indra, or the gods  
Appear like particles of grass.  
Do not, O Sadhu! set your heart  
On any ephemeral enjoyment other than that.

41

That lovely city, that grand monarch  
And that circle of feudatory kings at his side,  
That cabinet of shrewd counsellors of his  
And those beauties with moon-like faces,  
That group of wayward princes,  
Those court-minstrels and their songs of praise,  
Under whose power all this fled away  
And became objects of memory,  
To that Kala<sup>7</sup>—salutation!

---

<sup>7</sup> Kala: time, or the principle of change.

42

Where in some home, or a square  
In the case of a checkerboard,  
There once were many, there is now one,  
And where there was one or many successively,  
There is none at the end of the game,  
This is the process in which  
The expert Kala plays his game  
On the checkerboard of this world,  
With living beings as the pieces to be moved,  
And casting the two dice of day and night!

43

Daily, with the rising and setting of the sun,  
Life shortens, and the flight of time is not felt  
On account of affairs heavily burdened  
With manifold activities.  
Neither is fear produced at beholding  
Birth, death, old age and sufferings.  
Alas! the world is become mad  
By drinking the stupefying wine of delusion!

44

Seeing even the same night  
To be ever following the same day,  
In vain do creatures run  
On their worldly course perseveringly,  
Busy with various activities set agoing secretly  
By way of individual mental resolves;  
Alas, through infatuation, we do not feel ashamed  
At being thus befooled by this *samsara*,  
With occupations in which  
The same particulars repeat themselves!

45

The feet of the Lord have not been meditated upon (by me)

For the sake of doing away with this *samsara* or worldly bondage.  
Neither has *dharma*<sup>8</sup> been earned,  
Such as is strong to knock open the gates of heaven.  
We have simply proved to be hatchets, as it were,  
To cut upon the garden of our mother's youth;  
That is, we have simply made our mother age through giving birth to us.  
That is the only result we find worthy of mention.

46

The proper scholarship for a cultured man  
Such as enables one to defeat hosts of disputants,  
Has not been acquired.  
By the point of the sword strong to knock down  
The capacious temples of elephants,  
Fame has not been carried to the heaven.  
Useless has youth passed away  
Like a lamp in a deserted house.

47

Knowledge free from defect has not been mastered;  
For, how to be free from doctrines incapable of proof?  
Riches neither are earned.  
Services to parents have not been rendered with single-mindedness.  
Like crows, all the time has been passed in greediness for food,  
Or maintenance obtainable from others.

48

Those from whom we were born,  
Well, they are now on intimate footing with Eternity<sup>9</sup>;  
Those with whom we were brought up  
Have also become objects of memory.  
Now that we have become old  
We are approaching nearer to our fall day by day,  
Our condition being comparable  
To that of trees on the sandy bank of a river.

---

<sup>8</sup> Dharma: merit through performance of religious duties.

<sup>9</sup> Eternity (here): long dead

49

The ordained life of man  
Is limited to one hundred years;  
Half of it is spent in night,  
And out of the other half  
One half again is passed in childhood and old age;  
And the rest, which has its illness,  
Bereavements and troubles,  
Is spent in serving others.  
What happiness can there be for mortals in life again,  
Which is even more uncertain  
Than the ripples on the surface of water?

50

Now a child for a while  
And then a youth of erotic ways,  
A destitute now for a while  
And then in abundance;  
Just like an actor,  
Man makes at the end of his role,  
When diseased in all limbs by age  
And wrinkled all over the body,  
His exit behind the scene that veils  
The abode of Yama—death.

51

Thou art a king.  
We, too, are elevated through self-assurance  
About the wisdom we acquired  
From our preceptor whom we served.  
Thou art celebrated through thy possessions;  
Our fame is spread abroad in all quarters by the learned men.  
Thus a great difference there is between both of us,  
Made by honour and riches.  
If thou art cold towards us,  
We too are perfectly indifferent towards thee.

52

Thou exercisest kingly power over riches,  
We do the same over words—  
With ideas and scriptures, in all their senses.  
Thou art a hero in battle,  
While we have a never-failing skill in methods  
Of subduing the pride of disputants.  
It is the rich who serve thee;  
While intent on learning higher truths,  
Men serve us to have all imperfections of mind destroyed.  
If thou hast no regard for me,  
Well, O king,  
I have absolutely none for thee.

53

Here, we are satisfied with the bark of trees  
And thou, with rich garment;  
And yet our contentment is alike,  
So the distinction makes no difference.  
Poor indeed is he whose desires are boundless.  
If the mind be contented,  
Who is rich and who poor?

54

Fruits for food,  
Tasteful water for drink,  
Bare ground to lie upon,  
Barks of trees for clothing,  
Are sufficient for us.  
I cannot bring myself to approve  
Of the misbehaviour of evil men  
Whose senses are all led astray  
By drinking the wine of  
Newly acquired wealth.

55

Let us eat the food we have begged;  
Let the sky be our clothing;  
Let us lie down on the surface of the earth;  
What have we to do with the rich?

56

Who are we to go to see a king—  
Not dancers, court-jesters, or singers,  
Nor experts in learned disputes  
With others in a court,  
Nor youthful court mistresses!  
That is, we have absolutely no business  
To go to a king.

57

In ancient times, the kingdom of this world  
Was created by some large-hearted monarchs;  
By some it was ruled and sustained,  
And by others it was conquered  
And given away like straw.  
Even now, some heroes enjoy  
The fourteen divisions of the world.  
For what, then, is this feverish pride of men  
Having sovereignty over a few towns only?

58

What high dignity, alas, is there for kings  
In gaining that earth which has never for a moment  
Been left unenjoyed by hundreds of rulers!  
The stupid owners of even a shred  
Of the limb of a fraction of its fraction:  
The most minute particle,  
Feel delighted,  
Whereas, on the contrary,  
They ought to grieve!



59

The earth is but a lump of clay  
 Circled by a ring of water!  
 Even the whole of it is but a particle.  
 Hosts of kings, having partitioned it  
 After fighting hundreds of battles, enjoy it.  
 Though even poor insignificant persons  
 Might have given some away,  
 Downright shame on those mean fellows  
 Who would beg bits of coin from such as these!

60

That man is indeed born truly great  
 Whose white skull, after death, is placed  
 High on the head as an ornament  
 By Siva—the enemy of Madana, or Cupid;  
 And, of what worth is this rising fever  
 Of exceeding pride in men,  
 Who are nowadays adored by some people  
 With minds intent on preserving their lives!

61

Why, O heart, dost thou set thyself  
 On winning good graces, so hard to secure,  
 By daily propitiating other men's minds in various ways?  
 When, being serene inwardly and free from society,  
 Thou hast gems of thought rising up of themselves  
 When desires do not induce thy thinking—  
 These objects even mere wish would not bring to thee!

62

Why dost thou, my mind,  
 Wander about in vain?  
 Rest thyself somewhere.  
 Whatever happens in a particular way,  
 Happens so by itself, and not otherwise.

So, not thinking over the past  
Nor resolving about the future,  
I realise enjoyments that come  
Without engaging my thoughts.

63

Desist, O heart, from the  
Troublesome maze of sense-objects!  
Take that path of highest good which  
Is capable of bringing about, in a moment,  
The destruction of endless troubles!  
Get thee to the state of thy Atman!  
Give up thy stream-like agitated flux;  
Be calm now; and never again seek  
Transient worldly attachments!

64

Clear off delusion and earn devotion to Him  
Whose crown is begemmed with the crescent.  
O heart! accept attachment to some spot  
On the bank of the celestial river Ganges.  
What reliability is there on waves or bubbles,  
Flashes of lightning, or smiles of fortune—  
In tongues of flame, serpents, or hosts of friends?

65

O heart! never for a while earnestly  
Think of the frail goddess of fortune,  
Whose business it is to sell herself away  
While moving in her haunt: namely,  
The wrinkle of a king's brow,  
For, the bargain is struck  
By the smile or the frown of kings.  
Let us clothe ourselves in ragged garments,  
And entering the doors of houses  
In the streets of Varanasi  
Wait for the alms to be placed

In the receptacle of our hands.

66

If there are songs being sung before you,  
Sweet skillful poets from the South by your side  
And the tinkling of the bracelets of waitresses  
Waving *chowries* in their hands,  
Then lavishly attach thyself  
To the enjoyment of worldly happiness.  
If otherwise, O my heart!  
Then plunge into the absolute type of meditation.

67

Though embodied beings obtain that prosperity  
From which all desires are milked—what then?  
What if their feet be placed on the heads of their enemies,  
Or what if their wealth brings friends?—  
Or if their bodies endure till the end of the creative cycle?  
What then?

68

When there is devotion for Shiva,  
As also fear of birth and death in the heart,  
No attachment for family,  
No excitement of sexual passions;  
When there is the solitude of forest depths  
Unsullied by the company of worldly men  
And when there is renunciation—  
What better, then, is to be wished for?

69

What avails all this agitating over the unreal?  
Meditate, therefore, on that supreme,  
Infinite, ageless, all-pervading Brahman,  
In the Light of which all such enjoyments,  
As the sovereignty of the world,

Appear as the desires of pitiable men!

70

Being thus agitated, O mind,  
You now descend into the nether regions,  
Now soar up beyond the skies  
And wander all round the four quarters!  
Why, even by mistake, do you not once  
Concentrate on that Brahman of the nature  
Of self and bereft of all imperfections,  
Whereby you may attain supreme bliss?

71

What are worth the Vedas, the Smritis,  
The readings from the Puranas,  
The vast Shastras,  
Or the mazes of ceremonials,  
Which give us, as their fruits,  
A resting-place in heaven,  
As though a village interspersed with huts.  
All else is but the bargaining of traders  
Except that one way which admits one  
Into the state of supreme bliss in one's Self,  
And which is like the final destructive fire  
To consume the evolving mass of worldly miseries.

72

Seeing that, when set all over the fires of cyclic destruction  
The stately mountain Meru topples down,  
The seas, which are the abode of numerous sharks  
And aquatic animals, are dried up,  
And the earth itself comes to an end,  
Though held firm by the feet of mountains,  
What to speak of this body—  
As unsteady as the tip of the ear of a young elephant!

## 73

In old age the body becomes shrivelled,  
 The gait becomes unsteady,  
 The teeth fall out,  
 The eyesight is lost,  
 Deafness increases,  
 The mouth slavers,  
 Relatives do not value one's words,  
 The wife does not nurse,  
 And O, alas! even the son of a man  
 Of worn-out age turns hostile.

## 74

Seeing the grey hairs on the head of a man,  
 Emblematic of discomfiture by old age,  
 Youthful women at once fly away from him,  
 As if from a Chandala's<sup>10</sup> well  
 Whereon is placed a structure of bones!

## 75

As long as this body is free from disease and decrepitude,  
 As long as senility is far off,  
 As long as the powers of the senses are unaffected  
 And life is not decaying,  
 So long wise persons should put forth mighty exertions  
 For the sake of their supreme good;  
 For, when the house is on fire  
 What avails setting about digging a well for water?

## 76

Shall we live by the celestial river practising austerities,  
 Or shall we amiably serve our wives graced by virtues;  
 Or shall we drink of the currents of scriptural literature,  
 Or of the nectar of diverse poetical literature?

---

<sup>10</sup> Chandala: the untouchable in caste; it was a custom in former times with the Chandalas to line their well with bones for ornamentation.

Man, having the longevity of a few twinklings of the eye,  
We do not know which of these to undertake!

77

These rulers of the world  
Having minds restless like a horse  
And therefore difficult to please,  
And ambitious as we are  
With minds pitched on vast gain;  
And as age steals away bodily strength  
And death steals away this dear life,  
Ah friend! nothing and nowhere else  
Is there good for the wise in this world  
Excepting the practice of austerities.

78

When honour has faded,  
Wealth has become ruined,  
Those who sue for favours  
Have departed in disappointment,  
Friends have dwindled away,  
Retainers have left,  
And youth has gradually decayed,  
There remains only one thing  
Proper for the wise—  
Residence somewhere in a grove  
On the side of a valley of the Himalayas,  
Whose rocks are purified  
By the waters of the Ganges.

79

Delightful are the rays of the moon,  
Delightful the grassy plots in the outskirts of the forest,  
Delightful are the pleasures of wise men's society,  
Delightful the narratives in poetical literature,  
And delightful the face of the beloved  
Swimming in the tear-drops of feigned anger.

Everything is charming—  
But nothing is so when the mind is possessed  
By the evanescence of things!

80

Is not a palace pleasant to dwell in?  
Is not music with its accompaniments agreeable to listen to?  
Is not the society of women, dear as life itself, very pleasing?  
Yet, wise men have gone away to the forest,  
Regarding these things as unstable  
As the shadow of a lamp's flame flickering  
Through the puff of the wings of a deluded moth.

81

O dear! in our quest through the three worlds  
From the very beginning of their creation,  
None such has come within sight or hearing  
That can manage the prancings  
In the trap of the elephant of his mind  
When maddened by the mysterious,  
Deep-rooted infatuation  
For the female elephant of sense-object.

82

This freedom to wander about,  
This food to which no meanness attaches,  
The company of holy men,  
The cultivation of Vedic wisdom,  
Of which, unlike other vows,  
The only fruit is spiritual peace;  
The mind also restrained in its movements  
Towards external things—  
To such a consummation,  
I know not, after lifelong reflection,  
What noble austerities it may lead to!

83

Desires have worn off in our heart.  
Alas! youth has also passed away from the body.  
The virtues have proved themselves barren  
For want of appreciative admirers.  
The powerful, all-destroying, unrelenting Death  
Is fast hastening in!  
What is to be done?  
Ah me! I see there is no other refuge left  
Except at the feet of the Destroyer of Cupid.

84

I make no difference in substance between  
Shiva, the Lord of the universe  
And Vishnu, the inmost Self of the universe.  
But still my devotion is attached to the One  
In whose crest there is the crescent moon.

85

Sitting in peaceful posture during nights  
When all sounds are stilled into silence  
Somewhere on the banks of the heavenly river  
Which shines with the white glow  
Of the bright-diffused moonlight,  
And fearful of the miseries of birth and death,  
Crying aloud 'Shiva! Shiva! Shiva!'—  
Ah! when shall we attain to that ecstasy characterized by  
Copious tears of joy held in internal control!

86

Giving away all possessions,  
With a heart filled with tender compassion,  
Remembering the course of Destiny  
Which ends so ruefully in this world;  
And, as the only refuge for us,  
Meditating on the feet of Shiva,



O! we shall spend in the holy forest  
Nights aglow with the beams of the autumnal moon.

87

When shall I pass the days like a moment,  
Residing on the banks of the celestial river  
In Varanasi, clad in a *kaupina*,<sup>11</sup>  
And with folded hands raised to the forehead,  
Crying out: ‘O Lord of Gauri, the Slayer of Tripura,  
The Giver of all good, the Three-eyed—  
Have mercy!’

88

Having bathed in the waters of the Ganges  
And worshipping Thee, O Lord,  
With unblemished fruits and flowers,  
And having concentrated my mind,  
By my stony bed within the mountain cave,  
On the object of my meditation,  
Blissful in the Self alone,  
Living on fruits, and devoted to the guru’s words—  
When shall I, O Thou Enemy of Cupid, through Thy grace  
Become released from the grief which has arisen  
From my serving the man of prosperity?

89

O Shiva! when shall I,  
Living alone, free from desires,  
Peaceful in mind,  
With only the hand to eat from  
And the four quarters  
For the garment of nakedness,  
Be able to root out all Karma?

---

<sup>11</sup> Kaupina: a strip of cloth

90

Those who have only their hand to eat from,  
 Who are contended with begged food, pure by itself,  
 Who repose themselves anywhere: requiring no house or bed,  
 Who constantly regard the universe as almost a blade of grass,  
 Who even, before giving up the body,  
 Experience the uninterrupted Supreme Bliss—  
 For such Yogis, indeed,  
 The path which is easily accessed  
 By Shiva's grace becomes attainable—  
 That of Moksha or supreme liberation!

91

If there is even a *kaupina* worn out  
 And shredded a hundred times,  
 And a wrap also of the same condition,  
 If one is free from all disquieting thought,  
 If food there is, obtained unconditionally from begging,  
 And sleep on a cremation ground or in the forest,  
 If one wanders alone without any let up or hindrance,  
 If the mind is always calm,  
 And if one is steadfast in the festive joy of Yoga,  
 What is then worth the rulership of the three worlds?

92

Can this universe, which is but a mere reflection,  
 Engender greed in wise men?  
 The ocean surely does not become agitated  
 By the movement of a little fish.

93

O Mother Lakshmi, goddess of wealth,  
 Serve thou someone else;  
 Do not be longing for me.  
 Those who desire enjoyment are subject to thee,  
 But what art thou to us who are free from desires?

Now we wish to live upon food articles obtained from begging  
And placed, comfortably to its being sanctified,  
In a receptacle of Palasha leaves pieced together on the spot.

94

The earth is his high bed,  
The arms his ample pillow,  
The sky is his canopy,  
The genial breeze his fan,  
The autumnal moon is his lamp,  
And rejoicing in the company  
Of abnegation as his wife,  
The sage lies down happily and peacefully  
Like a monarch of undiminished glory.

95

There lives the real ascetic  
Who feeds himself on alms—  
Unattached to the society of men,  
Always free in his efforts  
Without obligation or restraint from outside,  
Pursuing a path of indifference  
As regards what to give up or what to take;  
His worn out garment is made up  
Of rags cast away in streets,  
And for seating he has with him a blanket;  
He is devoid of pride and egoism  
And is concerned only in enjoying  
The happiness arising from the control of mind!

96

When accosted by people who loquaciously express  
Doubt and surmise, such as:  
'Is he a Chandala, or a twice-born one,  
Or a Sudra, or an ascetic,  
Or perhaps some supreme Yogi  
With his mind full of the discrimination of Reality?'—

The Yogis themselves go their way:  
Neither pleased nor displeased in mind.

97

If, for even serpents, air has been provided  
By the Creator as food obtainable  
Without killing or toiling;  
If beasts are contented with feeding  
On grass-sprouts and lying on the ground;  
For men, also, with intelligence strong enough  
To lead across the ocean of transmigratory existence,  
Some such livelihood has been created;  
And those who seek this have all their *gunas*  
Invariably brought to their final dissolution.

98

Will those happy days come to me, when,  
On the bank of the Ganges,  
Sitting in the lotus-posture  
On a piece of stone in the Himalayas,  
I shall fall into the *yoga-nidra*—  
Losing all consciousness in *samadhi*,  
Or perfect concentration that results from  
Regular practice of the contemplation of Brahman,  
And when old antelopes, having nothing to fear,  
Will rub their limbs against my body?

99

With the hand serving as sacred cup  
For begged food that comes through wandering  
And never runs short,  
With the ten quarters as their ample garment  
And the earth as a fixed, spacious bed—  
Blessed are they who having forsaken  
The manifold worldly associations  
Which an attitude of want breeds,  
And self-contented, with a heart fully matured  
Through their acceptance of absolute seclusion,

Root out all *karma*—the complex  
Of causes and effects which grows on,  
As action and desire in life follow each other.

100

O Earth, my mother!  
O Wind, my father!  
O Fire, my friend!  
O Water, my good relative!  
O Sky, my brother!  
Here is my salutation to you with clasped hands!  
Having cast away Ignorance with its wonderful infatuations  
By means of an amplitude of pure knowledge  
Resplendent with shining merits developed  
Through my association with you all,  
I now merge in the Supreme Brahman.

Here ends the Vairagya-Satakam or the  
Hundred Verses on Renunciation of the triple  
series of such hundred verses named  
'Subhashita-Trishati'.

## INDEX

### The Poems of Bharatrihari *Categorized by Subject*

SUBJECT	VERSE(S)
abundance, <i>prevalence of, at all times</i>	27
action, <i>interwoven with desire</i>	99
anxiety, <i>burning power of</i>	7
appearances, <i>lure of</i>	16
arrogance, <i>can be engendered by hardship</i>	25
ascetic life	
<i>blessedness of</i>	86, 87, 88, 95, 98
<i>blessings (unimaginable) of</i>	82
<i>bliss of the sage, monarch of undiminished glory</i>	94
<i>ecstasy of</i>	85
<i>proper life for the wise</i>	78
<i>sanctity of</i>	93
attachments	
<i>to ceremonial observances (perilous)</i>	11
<i>choice: attachments to worldly life, or meditation</i>	66
<i>destroys patience and fortitude</i>	10
<i>like animals of prey (to objects)</i>	10
austerities, <i>practice of</i>	77
benevolence, <i>of the wise</i>	39
betrayal, <i>of and by all</i>	73
body, <i>reality of</i>	16
birth, <i>to death: taintedness of</i>	37
busyness	44
Bliss	
<i>of Self</i>	71
<i>Supreme</i>	70
<i>the final destructive fire consuming worldly miseries</i>	71
<i>uninterrupted</i>	95
blissfulness	88
Brahman	
<i>attachment to</i>	36

<i>the nature of Self</i>	70
ceremonial observances	11, 71
change	41
choice(s)	63
<i>the world or the Self</i>	66, 76
compassion	86
concentration, <i>perfection of</i>	98
contentment	53
cravings	
<i>insatiableness of</i>	29
<i>impact on mind</i>	12
creation, <i>instability of</i>	34
Cupid ( <i>poisoned arrows of</i> )	17
death	
<i>impossibility of accepting finality of</i>	9
<i>speed of approach</i>	48
delusion	
<i>as stupefying wine</i>	43
<i>of 'reality', as waves or bubbles</i>	64
depths	
<i>depraved: that can be reached</i>	5
<i>encouraged by hardship</i>	25
<i>unethical (that can be stooped to)</i>	21, 24
desire	2, 3, 4, 8, 13
<i>ceaseless</i>	10
<i>freedom from</i>	93
<i>intensity of</i>	15
<i>interwoven with action</i>	99
<i>not reduced in force</i>	7
<i>power to rejuvenate</i>	8
<i>sating of</i>	19
<i>sensual: power of delusion, danger of</i>	18
<i>slavery towards</i>	17
<i>worldly associations engendered by</i>	99
devotion	
<i>to Him</i>	64
<i>to Guru's words</i>	88
dharma	45

discernment, <i>a human endowment</i>	18
discrimination, <i>purifier of mind</i>	13
diseases	19
disgracefulness	24
dissolution, <i>of earth, body – all</i>	72
divine life, <i>ecstasy of</i>	85
earth, <i>as mother</i>	100
earthly life, <i>as means of Self-realization</i>	100
possessions, <i>transience of</i>	36
egoism, <i>having been dissolved</i>	95
embodied, living beings	
<i>as gamepieces</i>	42
<i>life of</i>	34
encouragement, <i>to take path of highest good</i>	63
enculturement, <i>true</i>	46
endeavors, <i>foolish</i>	2, 4
enjoyment(s)	
<i>as aim</i>	28
<i>fleetingness of</i>	35
<i>only One</i>	40
equanimity, <i>attainment of</i>	35
evanescence, <i>of things</i>	79
events, <i>happen by themselves</i>	62
fear	
<i>great</i>	31
<i>ocean of: crossing of</i>	36
felicity, <i>uninterrupted</i>	28
fire	
<i>as friend</i>	100
<i>that burns world's miseries</i>	71
food	
<i>greediness for: obliterating duty</i>	47
<i>qualities of food that is begged for</i>	30
freedom	82
fruits, <i>living on</i>	88
Goal of life, <i>only One</i>	40
goal(s)	



<i>to attain highest beatitude</i>	34
<i>to cross the ocean of transmigratory existence</i>	97
<i>sublime</i>	98
<i>putting forth mighty exertions towards one's supreme good</i>	75
grace, of the Lord (Shiva)	90
greed	59
<i>insatiableness of</i>	29
grief	
<i>burning power of</i>	7
<i>release from</i>	88
gunas	
<i>strength of</i>	15
<i>will dissolve finally</i>	97
happiness	
<i>being control of mind</i>	95
<i>'happiness'</i>	19
hardship, beckonings of	25
health, purpose of	75
heart	
<i>the, an appeal to</i>	65
<i>matured into fullness</i>	99
hesitancy	76
highest good, beckonings towards path of	63, 64, 66
hope	10
hunger, unimagined power of	22, 23
ignorance	18
<i>casting off of</i>	100
<i>destruction of, overcasting mind</i>	1
<i>essence of infatuations</i>	100
<i>power of delusion</i>	20
imagination (creations of)	14
indiscretion	26
infatuation, mysterious, deep-rooted, mighty	81
intuition, arising of	61
joy	
<i>of having left worldliness</i>	28
<i>perpetual</i>	29

Kala: <i>time or the principle of change</i>	41, 42
karma, <i>rooting out of</i>	89, 99
kings	
<i>life of, versus that of Yogis</i>	51
<i>preoccupations of, versus that of Yogis</i>	52
knowledge	
<i>Light of, residing in Yogi's heart</i>	1
<i>pure</i>	100
life	
<i>as ordained; realities of, uncertainty of</i>	49
<i>the best in life!</i>	68
<i>comforts, pleasantries: utter instability of</i>	80
<i>delights, charms of life</i>	79
<i>earthly: all aspects: everything seized by the same power</i>	32
<i>impotence of</i>	33
<i>insecurity of</i>	35
<i>insubstantiality of</i>	34
<i>life of embodied beings</i>	35
<i>(a) lifetime: like actor on a stage</i>	50
<i>realities of: imperviousness to</i>	38
<i>transience of... fleetingness of</i>	36
<i>true, ultimate meaning of</i>	45
<i>unencumbered, free</i>	90
livelihood	97
longevity, <i>nearly non-existent</i>	76
Lotus-Feet of the Guru (Shiva)	
<i>meditation upon</i>	86
<i>only Refuge</i>	83
love	
<i>as infatuation</i>	17
meditation	66, 70, 86
<i>on Brahman</i>	69
mental...	
<i>equilibrium (loss of)</i>	19
<i>poise: pleasure and pain perceived as being alike (Yoga)</i>	17
<i>mercy, bestower of</i>	87
mind	

<i>agenda-making (intensity of)</i>	44
<i>agendas (wasting of energies)</i>	51
<i>agitated: reaches nether-regions</i>	70
<i>agitation — give it up!</i>	63
<i>agitation of, lures of</i>	70
<i>attach to Brahman</i>	36
<i>calm</i>	91
<i>concentration of</i>	88
<i>concentration, perfection of</i>	98
<i>destruction of imperfections</i>	53
<i>mean-mindedness</i>	28
<i>motives (veiled)</i>	59
<i>purification of</i>	39
<i>purified by discrimination</i>	13
<i>purified by quelling hope that enmeshes</i>	39
<i>restraint of</i>	82
<i>seeks favor</i>	61
<i>thought, transiency of</i>	36
<i>wanderings of</i>	62
<i>Moksha, supreme liberation</i>	90
<i>money, brooded on night and day</i>	6
<i>mundane life, futility of</i>	7
<i>non-attachment</i>	86
<i>non-covetousness</i>	29
<i>objects of enjoyment (reluctance to discard)</i>	12
<i>offerings, to the Lord</i>	88
<i>old age, discomfiture of</i>	74
<i>Oneness, with Supreme Brahman</i>	100
<i>ownership, triumphant feeling of</i>	58
<i>path of highest good</i>	63
<i>patience, attainment of</i>	35
<i>pleasure/non-pleasure, transcendence of</i>	96
<i>poverty</i>	53
<i>power, fleetingness of</i>	41
<i>pranas</i>	
<i>5 vital forces (unreliable)</i>	5
<i>preservation of</i>	23

prayer	
<i>answering of through Lord's grace</i>	89
<i>of petition</i>	87, 89, 93, 100
Prem, <i>presence of</i>	98
present, the: <i>living in</i>	62
pretense	6
pride	
<i>elicited in presence of rich</i>	5
<i>feverishness of</i>	57, 60
<i>having been dissolved</i>	95
profit, <i>sufferings due to preoccupation with</i>	27
prosperity, <i>so-called</i>	67
provisions, <i>of the Creator</i>	97
'reality': <i>delusion: as waves or bubbles</i>	64
realities of life ( <i>imperviousness to</i> )	38
religious practices, <i>fruits thereof</i>	71
renunciation	12, 13
<i>blessings of</i>	61
<i>blessedness of</i>	20
<i>supreme blessedness of</i>	68
<i>fearlessness of</i>	31
renunciators, <i>refuge of</i>	26
resplendence, <i>of merits</i>	100
rich, the	26, 27
<i>in presence of as causing pride</i>	5
riches	26, 27
<i>imperviousness to</i>	55
samadhi	98
samsara, <i>befoolment of</i>	44
scriptures, the	71
seclusion	99
self-contentment	98
self-possession	12
sense-objects	63
senses	
<i>sense cravings (impact on mind)</i>	12
<i>slavery to</i>	6
serenity	61

Shiva	1, 17, 30
<i>devoted attachment to</i>	84
<i>feeding house of: inexhaustible</i>	30
<i>grace of the Lord</i>	88, 90
<i>(as) Light of Knowledge</i>	1
<i>lotus-feet of the Guru) meditation upon</i>	86
<i>strikes down ignorance</i>	1
sky, <i>as brother</i>	100
speech, <i>delirious</i>	26
taxation	59
thought, <i>transiency of</i>	36
time	
<i>ever-present and infinite</i>	7
<i>flight of/shortening of life: not felt</i>	43
transcendence, <i>of pleasure/non-pleasure</i>	96
unhappiness	37
unreality: <i>taken as reality, agitation over</i>	69
virtues, <i>like lotus in shining bright moonlight</i>	22
water, <i>as good relative</i>	100
wealth	4, 53
<i>as conceived by Creator</i>	29
<i>inebriation of</i>	54
wealthy, <i>in service of</i>	88
wickedness	38
wind, <i>as Father</i>	100
wisdom	35
<i>Vedic</i>	82
wise, the	80
<i>benevolence of</i>	39
<i>companionship of</i>	82
<i>imperturbability of</i>	92
world	
<i>conquest of (endless)</i>	57
<i>nature of</i>	39
worldliness	
<i>entrapments of every quality that is coveted</i>	31

<i>imperviousness to</i>	56
<i>imprisonment of</i>	20
<i>joy of having left (quiet)</i>	28
world rulership, frivolousness of	90
worldly...	
<i>associations (engendered by desire)</i>	99
<i>pleasures – unenjoyable, devouring power</i>	7
worship, of the Lord	88
 Yoga	
<i>attained by patience and equanimity</i>	35
<i>steadfast joy of</i>	91
<i>mental poise</i>	17
yoga-nidra, losing all consciousness in samadhi	98
Yogis	10
<i>fearlessness of wildlife amidst</i>	14, 98
<i>freedom of</i>	96
<i>glorious life: inestimable qualities of all aspect of</i>	30
<i>glory of life of</i>	14
<i>imperturbability of</i>	96
<i>Knowledge (Light of) residing in Yogi's heart</i>	1
<i>life (sufficiency of)</i>	54
<i>life of (versus that of kings)</i>	51
<i>path of</i>	89
<i>preoccupations of, versus that of kings</i>	52
<i>of pure mind: transcend river of desire</i>	10
<i>teachers (exemplary life of)</i>	34
youthfulness (uselessness of)	46

## Appendix

Biographical and study notes of Bhartrihari will be found in the on-line books:

*Vairagya Satakam*, translated by Swami Madhavananda;

*A Comparative History of World Philosophy: from the Upanishads to Kant* (1997) by Ben-Ami Scharfstein;

and, at the website of the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, upon a search for ‘Bhartrihari’.

